

Larcenous Birds.  
Longman's Magazine.

Among foreign birds, the bower bird almost rises for a season to the level of intelligence of the suburban householder who "picks up" pretty things to decorate his house with. It would never be safe to leave a Japanese fan or a bit of blue china within reach of a bower bird. He uses a certain amount of judgment, too, in the selection and arrangement of his spoils, thus proving an exception to the rule that the larceny of the lower orders of creation, except where food is concerned, is an aimless crime, a mere vicious habit.

Who, for instance, could feel any sympathy with a tom-tit that stole a check? Yet a country gentleman of Cheshire was once sent galloping twenty miles to fetch the police to catch the thief who had stolen a check from inside an envelope which was inside his own letter-box in his own hall-gate—all through a tom-tit. The envelope and the covering letter were there; but the whereabouts of the check might have remained as great a mystery as any Thames Embankment robbery in open daylight, but that when the gentleman and the police arrived and proceeded to solemnly inspect the letter-box, two tom-tits were discovered inside. This led to a search, and twenty yards off, lying on the ground, with beak marks upon it, was the check. Whether the tom-tits had returned to find out in whose name they should forge an endorsement to the check is not clear; but this new development of the criminal tendency which has always been latent in the whole race of its cannot be too strongly reprobated. Even the jackdaw of Rhines, the "horrid example" of larcenous birdhood, would never have stolen a check. When he purloined the cardinal's signet ring, and suffered terribly from the pip when excommunicated for his crime, he had sufficient good feeling to repent heartily and bring back the at len jewel. Its glitter had appealed, too, more to his sense of beauty than to any sordid love of filthy lucre. He stole the ring to be a thing of beauty and a sparkling joy in his dark niche under the belfry, rather than with a view to pawning or selling it and spending the proceeds in riotous living. So with that other famous thief in feathers—the magpie who stole the spoon while the milkmaid was flirting, and got that daughter of Eve into a deal of trouble—it is altogether unlikely that the bird cared one grub whether the spoon was silver or electrolite. He knew that it would have a very fine appearance among the ragged sticks of his domed nest; and so, as no one was looking, he drew it out from among the others just as gently as if he were playing spic-and-span, gave three hops and a flap of his wings, and the spoon and the girl's reputation for honesty went away over the fields together.

Other damning instances there are of jackdaw and magpie, the red legged chough, and even, sad to say, the clerical gaited raven, being decoyed from the straight path of rectitude by the empty glitter of a gem. Unlike *Æsop's* moralizing cock, who, having scratched up a necklace, apostrophized Heaven of the uselessness of such a stroke of fortune to him, these sable, solemn fowl seem to have a burglarious twist in their nature over which they have no control. In proportion to their reverent aspect and grave demeanor in their serious suits of black is their eagerness to purloin, at all costs, any bit of tawdry metalware to give a dash of meretricious finery to their bare nests. There may be the germ of civilization in this. The South Sea Islander, of whose destiny hereafter missionaries appear to entertain no doubt whatever, would in the early days of their acquaintance barter his best wife for a piece of tinfoil and shed a missionary's blood for the sake of the blue glass in his spectacles. Inasmuch, therefore, as the civilized Fijian, dressed in broad-cloth and square-toed boots, makes a very respectable member of a Christian community, though his granddaddy may have worn nothing more than "a shaggy head of hair, two brass rings, and a necklace of dog's teeth," there is yet hope for the jackdaw when civilization has permeated his system and broken down that brazen sanctity, that impudent assumption of reverend virtue, which at present forms an impenetrable barrier to all attempts at conversion. Speak to a jackdaw mildly but firmly, and he listens to you with a side-long air of respectful interest. Turn away your head for a moment, and a tug at your boot lace tells you that the hypocritical scamp has tried to steal the metal tag at the end of it. Just in the same way the missionaries have found that, however pious and attentive their savage congregation may be, they have all one eye apiece on the look out for perquisites. The very analogy teaches us that a jackdaw's case is not hopeful.

**THE FRENCH QUICK-FIRER.**—It is known that the French quick-firer has a more reliable mechanism than the German gun, and, as has been stated in the columns of many newspapers, the French have, during the past summer, carried out very exhaustive trials with batteries already equipped. The French quick-firer has certain features similar to the design of Vickers & Sons. A description of this firm's 12½-pounder quick-firing horse artillery gun and mounting is given in the *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* for August. The system may be briefly described thus: The mounting consists mainly of the following parts—namely, the trail, the top carriage, the hydraulic buffer, and the wheels and axle-tree. All parts of the mounting are free to recoil except the hydraulic buffer, which is placed between the outside plates of the trail.

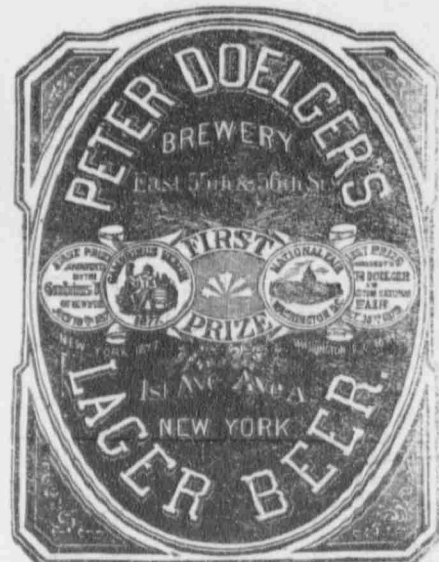
The front end of the buffer-piston is fixed to the front end of the mounting; and to the rear end of the buffer is attached a strong spade. On firing, the spade is forced into the ground, thereby arresting all movement rearwards, but the trail being free to move forces the piston-rod into the hydraulic buffer, thereby displacing the liquid, at the same time compressing a powerful spring. After the energy of the recoil has been absorbed, the power stored up in the spring serves to run the gun forward into the firing position again. The gun itself rests in a "top carriage" which is pivoted to the front part of the trail, so that it can be trained 3 deg. each way without moving the trail. The French, have, so to speak, kept their quick-firer under lock and key, and it has been said that so far the officers and men of the batteries so armed are not in the secret of the system. It is difficult to credit this statement, unless the personnel of the batteries are prohibited from cleaning the guns, for the care and preservation of ordnance necessitates those who perform this duty having free access to the various parts of the mechanism.—*Broad Arrow.*

**San Marino, the Smallest Independent Republic in Europe.**  
*Scientific American.*

Few visitors to Italy ever make the excursion from Rimini to San Marino, the smallest independent republic in Europe, although it is one of the most curious places in Italy, if not in Europe, for it has maintained itself as a republic ever since the earliest times of Christianity. San Marino, which has an area of thirty three square miles, lies between the provinces of Forlì and Pesaro-Urbino, and is thus entirely surrounded by Italian domains. It is situated on part of the eastern spurs of the Apennines. Monte Titano, the central and culminating summit, has three peaks, each surmounted by a castle. The coat of arms of the republic is three towers, which seem to have been suggested by these rocky summits with their fortresses. The city of San Marino has 1,600 inhabitants out of 8,000 of the republic. It is one of the most picturesque places in the world, being perched on perpendicular cliffs; and when we look at them we can then understand that the extraordinary mountains and rocks in the backgrounds of the paintings of Perugini, Raphael, and other Umbrian painters were not nightmares, but were really taken from nature. Borgo di San Marino, at the foot of the cliffs, is the commercial centre of the Republic, and here we first find the money coined by it. A steep path leads up to the picturesque Citta, to which we have already referred. From the castle there is a magnificent view of the Adriatic, and even, on a clear day, the coast of Dalmatia may be seen. It is said that when the mail arrives at Borgo a bell is sounded, and those who live on the cliffs have to descend to get their mail, if they wish it; for, owing to the primitive state of affairs, the postman never ascends the rock.

It may well be asked how it is that such an anomaly as the microscopic republic is allowed to exist in the heart of a monarchy. The history of San Marino is an interesting one. The first authentic document dates from 885. The inhabitants purchased territory from neighbouring princes, and the commonwealth assisted Pope Pius II. (*Æneas Sylvius*) against the Malatestas of Rimini, and as a reward received three little castles. On the annexation of Urbino to the States of the Church, in 1531, the independence of San Marino was acknowledged. In 1797 Napoleon decided to preserve the small republic, and in 1834 Napoleon III. saved it from the designs of Pius IX. When Italy became unified, San Marino obtained excellent terms. It is governed by a great council of sixty members—twenty nobles, twenty burgesses, twenty rural landowners, named for life by the council itself. From this body is elected the Council of Twelve, which, with a legal adviser, decides all questions. Two captains-regent, elected every six months, represent the State, which has also its Home Secretary, its Minister of Foreign Affairs, its Chancellor of the Exchequer, its army of 950 men, and a regular Budget. By treaty with Italy, San Marino receives a certain proportion of Italian Customs revenue, but exacts no customs on her borders. She also agrees not to grow tobacco, but is allowed to import tobacco duty free. In order to avoid copyright difficulties, there is no printing press in San Marino. It is a curious fact that the commissary, or judge, and the physician must both be strangers, and they are paid out of the public purse. Such are a few of the curious facts connected with the smallest independent republic in Europe—or the world, for that.

**A LEGAL CONFERENCE ON THE RIGHTS OF JEWS IN RUSSIA.**—A conference of Government notaries has been held at Kamenetz Podolsk, to clear up some debatable points in the law affecting the rights of Jews, so that every notary, to whom is submitted a document relating to the purchase or lease by Jews of property in villages, may know whether the transaction is legal or not. The following decisions were arrived at: (1) When a Jew legally lives in a village, he has a right to rent a house (this was contested by several notaries). (2) It is forbidden to Jews to buy grain growing in the fields, or to lease land for the exploitation of minerals, coal, chalk, and, generally, everything that lies below the earth's surface. (3) Jews are permitted, when legally resident in villages, to buy the threshed corn or flour from the peasants. A few Jews in the west have petitioned the Government to allow them to lease small plots of land in the village on condition that they shall cultivate their lots without employing any laborers. *Jewish Chronicle.*



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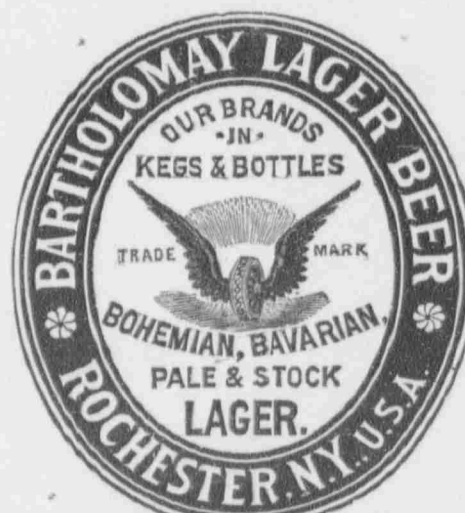
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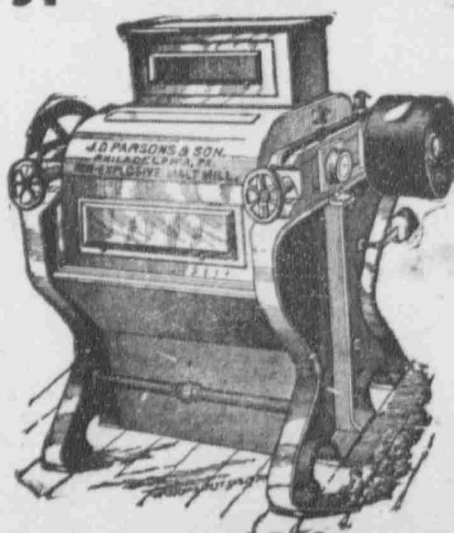
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